

A Comparison of Passion and Teaching Modality

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Abstract

Research exists that applies the dualistic model of passion to face-to-face teaching, but no research has applied this model to online instruction. Distance education theories imply a need to discover factors contributing to online faculty motivation to engage students. Although there has been extensive exploration of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to teach online, factors contributing to consistent and optimal teaching behavior has received less attention. There is evidence that the passion construct is independent of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. A stratified random sample of online and face-to-face faculty ($n = 92$) were surveyed using the Passion Scale. The results showed that 95 percent of the sampled online faculty self-identified as passionate for their online instruction. In the between-groups analysis, there were no significant differences in the variables of passion orientation, harmonious passion, and obsessive passion by modality. This research provides a basis for future research of passion in online instruction. In addition, this study adds another dimension for research within distance education theory, providing increased evidence for what motivates online instructors to consistently and effectively engage students.

Keywords: Distance education, motivation, online instruction, passion

INTRODUCTION

The psychological construct of passion has been applied to secondary and post-secondary teachers in a face-to-face setting, but it has not been researched in online instruction (Carbonneau, Vallerand, Fernet, & Guay, 2008; Philippe, Vallerand, Houliort, Lavigne, & Donahue, 2010; Vallerand et al., 2003). There are several reasons to think that the construct of passion might help further elaborate current models of online instruction. First, current distance learning theories imply a need to understand what motivates online instructors to engage their students, but the predominant models do not focus on factors that motivate instructors to provide consistent and effective feedback (Baker, 2010; Garrison, 2011; Holmberg, 2003; Moore, 1993). Although empirical research has explored intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for choosing to teach online, it has not explained what motivates online instructors to persist in teaching for optimal learning outcomes (Gannon-Cook, Ley, Crawford, & Warner, 2009; Green, Alejandro, & Brown, 2009; Shattuck, 2013). Also, when controlling for intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, the passion construct tested as an independent factor (Vallerand et al., 2003; Vallerand, 2010). Both the positive and negative interpersonal outcomes of face-to-face teacher passion indicate it may be useful in explaining online instructor motivation to overcome challenges inherent in online education (Carbonneau et al., 2008; Philippe et al., 2010). To begin this exploration, the present study examined passion for a sample of online and face-to-face instructors.

As with any teaching context, online instruction has its challenges. With the steady increase in college students taking online courses, clarifying these challenges and opportunities is essential for online education (Allen & Seaman, 2014). Asynchronous learning, the most common online learning medium, adds to the difficulty of instructing online, due in part to the potential for misinterpretation and misunderstanding. This can lead to problems with ensuring

consistent learning comprehension, student satisfaction, and student retention (Basmat, Lewis, & Tice, 2008; Chyung, Winiecki, & Fenner, 1999; Dutton, Dutton, & Perry, 1999; Willging & Johnson, 2009). As Moore (1993) pointed out, the “psychological and communications spaces between any one learner and that person's instructor are never exactly the same” (p. 22).

Aligning these psychological and communications spaces can seem a daunting task in asynchronous learning environments. In the absence of highly ordered course structure or heightened student participation, the burden of ensuring this alignment rests primarily with the instructor. Added to an already challenging workload, overcoming these psychological and communication barriers could lead to instructor frustration and in extreme cases burnout symptoms. Although there is some debate whether online teacher burnout is more prevalent or likely than such outcomes in face-to-face instruction, these issues are certainly relevant when exploring online instructor effectiveness and persistence within an organizational plan for online education delivery ((McCann & Holt, 2009; Moore, 2013). In instances where passion for online instruction exists, the construct of passion may help explain instructor motivation to persist in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges presented by the delivery medium itself (Carbonneau et al., 2008; Philippe et al., 2010).

ONLINE LEARNING THEORIES

As Moore and Kearsley (2012) explained, online learning theory has deep roots that go back to correspondence learning, in which mail correspondence was the only teacher-student interaction. From distance education emerged transactional distance theory, which posits that student perceived psychological distance varies as teacher-student interaction either decreases or increases (Moore, 1973; Moore, 1993; Moore & Kearsley, 2012). The focus on interaction as an important factor led to positing two additional types of interaction, including student-student and

student-content interactions (Moore, 1989). With the advent of computer technology and the internet, researchers posited learner-interface (Hillman, Willis, & Gunawardena, 1994), teacher-teacher, teacher-content, and content-content interactions (Anderson, 2003). Positing these factors provided a useful framework to research distance education, but vital psychological and social aspects were missing from this scaffolding, such as instructor empathy and immediacy.

Immediacy in online learning is an important construct for exploring teacher-student interaction, especially when thinking about such feelings of belonging and striving for academic achievement (Baker, 2010; Kucuk, 2009; Melrose & Bergeron, 2006; Woods & Baker, 2004). Similar to Holmberg's (2003) idea of empathy in distance education, immediacy refers to interpersonal closeness mediated through both verbal and non-verbal cues (Gorham, 1988; Mehrabian, 1967). In online education, with temporal, spatial, and media barriers, the problem of sustaining immediate and empathetic instructor behavior may become more pronounced, particularly as participants strive to overcome feelings of isolation (Hillman et al., 1994). As Thweatt and McCroskey (1996) explained, "immediate behaviors may actually decrease the physical distance, or they may decrease the psychological distance" (p. 198). The community of inquiry model combined these ideas into one framework.

Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) created the community of inquiry framework as a process model that formulates interaction in online education as teaching, cognitive, and social presences. Based upon social learning theory, this model postulates that "learning is a social process" (Lowenthal, 2009, p. 129). Garrison (2011) defined a presence as "a sense of being or identity created through interpersonal communication" (p. 22). As a critical inquiry process, cognitive presence is clearly an important part of learning comprehension, but the teaching and social presences may hold essential clues to further exploring online instructor motivation

(Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2001). Garrison et al. (2000) referred to the teaching presence as the “binding element” in community of inquiry (p. 96), and Gunawardena (1995) described social presence as the degree to which participants seem real when interacted with through computer mediated communication. While transactional distance postulates the potential for psychological and communication difficulties in distance education, the community of inquiry model provides additional framework to help explain optimal instructional behavior in an online context. Both immediacy and empathy provide useful descriptions of optimal teacher-student interaction, but taken in combination, these models do not explain instructor motivation to consistently overcome inherent challenges in online education. Some instructors persist in overcoming these obstacles and other do not. The construct of passion may be a good candidate to further explain online instructor motivation to persist in performing at a high level, regardless of temporal, spatial, and media barriers.

Dualistic Model of Passion

Initial psychological research operationalized passion as liking (or love) for a well-defined activity, that one finds important or valued, in which one invests extensive time and energy, and which one identifies as a personal passion (Vallerand et al., 2003; Vallerand, 2010). Empirical research has demonstrated two types of passion exist – harmonious and obsessive, and these two types have some unique characteristics (Vallerand et al., 2003). First, the highly valued and meaningful nature of the activity of passion leads to internalization as part of identity (Donahue, Rip, & Vallerand, 2009; Vallerand, 2010). Identifying with an activity may help explain certain kinds of persistence within the activity of interest. Second, when controlling for intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, both types of passion have tested as independent motivational factors (Vallerand et al., 2003; Vallerand, 2010). Although similar to intrinsic motivation,

harmonious passion is activity not task dependent (Vallerand et al., 2003; Vallerand, 2010).

Extrinsic motivation is similar to obsessive passion, but in obsessive passion, there is a requirement for liking (or even loving) the activity (Vallerand et al., 2003; Vallerand, 2010). In addition to showing as independent motivational factors (in contrast to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation), there are several positive and negative outcomes of the passion types that could be useful in explaining some kinds of online instructor behavior.

For instance, within the dualistic model of passion, positive intrapersonal outcomes and moderating factors such as positive affect and subjective well-being correlate with harmonious passion (Vallerand et al., 2007). One would predict then that harmonious passion would likely produce positive outcomes in interpersonal interaction. Having harmonious passion for online teaching would mean freely identifying as an online teacher, regardless of social acceptance or other incentives, and controlling and readily balancing such teaching with other personal commitments (Fernet, Lavigne, Vallerand, & Austin, 2014).

Recent studies have specifically explored this relationship between passion and interpersonal outcomes and have found that this prediction holds true (Lafreniere, Jowett, Vallerand, Donahue, & Lorimer, 2008; Philippe et al., 2010). Of importance to online instruction, Philippe et al. (2010) explored the role of positive emotions in positive interpersonal interaction, and this research showed that harmonious passion correlates with positive emotions and that positive emotions are a mediating factor between harmonious passion and positive interpersonal interactions. Put another way, if an online instructor measures as harmoniously passionate for the activity online instruction, that person would be more likely to strive for positive interpersonal interactions, even in the face of frustrations caused by the delivery method.

The results of Philippe et al. (2010) provide the following framework relevant to online instructor motivation. First, they indicate that if an online instructor is harmoniously passionate for the activity of online instruction, such an instructor will likely have predictably consistent positive emotions within activity engagement and positive interpersonal interactions. Such factors align with the posited constructs of empathy and immediacy in online learning theory (Baker, 2010; Holmberg, 2003). In contrast, negative emotions were consistently associated as a mediator between obsessive passion and negative interpersonal outcomes, which would predict these same negative outcomes for online instructors measured as obsessively passionate for online instruction (Philippe et al., 2010). The result of these findings show harmonious passion as more adaptable in social settings, whereas obsessive passion as more rigid and less conducive to positive interpersonal outcomes (Philippe et al., 2010). In addition to these findings, harmonious passion has been correlated with good concentration (Mageau et al., 2005), flow (Philippe et al., 2009; Vallerand et al., 2003), and good decision making (Philippe et al., 2009), while obsessive passion has been correlated with internal conflict and rumination (Ratelle, Vallerand, Mageau, Rousseau, & Provencher, 2004; Vallerand, 2010). However, empirical evidence indicates that the often rigid persistence of those with obsessive passion for an activity tend to have equal or greater performance outcomes within activity engagement (Vallerand et al., 2007; Vallerand, 2010). Here the performance outcomes may sometimes be greater for obsessively passionate instructors, but the intrapersonal outcomes may be worse. Meeting performance requirements within activity engagement does not necessarily lead to greater well-being (Vallerand, 2010). In fact, due to more frequent negative emotions, internal conflict, and rumination correlated with obsessive passion, such instructors may meet performance requirements but likely not without a negative effect on their own well-being.

METHODS

The purpose of the present study was to compare passion in a sample of online and face-to-face instructors. Based upon previous passion research, there was an indication that there would be no statistically significant difference in passion by teaching modality (Carbonneau et al., 2008; Philippe et al., 2010; Vallerand, 2010). This finding would provide the basis for further research of the passion construct within online education, including further discussion of how the passion construct might apply to distance education theory. There were three specific research questions:

1. Is there a difference in passion orientation for instruction by teaching modality?
2. Is there a difference in harmonious passion for instruction by teaching modality?
3. Is there a difference in obsessive passion for instruction by teaching modality?

There were several reasons for selecting these research questions. First, three distinct variables of interest emerged from the literature review: passion orientation, harmonious passion, and obsessive passion. Since there were no studies that compared passion by modality, the first task was to assess the strength of association between modality and passion. As explained in the next section, the creation of the dichotomous variable *passion orientation* allowed for the evaluation of this association. In effect, passion orientation refers to the dominant type of passion present for instruction by modality. Here dominant was determined by using a z-score procedure and coding a passion type (harmonious or obsessive) based upon the higher total of the two passion subscales. This resulted in passion orientation for each case, which allowed for comparison across modality. Second, since there are two types of passion measured on the Passion Scale, two composite scores (one harmonious and one obsessive) were created for each case to determine any mean difference for each passion type by modality.

Participants

Participants included 112 faculty members at a large university in the southwestern United States offering both online and face-to-face courses. A stratified random sample of 606 faculty members (300 teaching online; 306 teaching face-to-face) were sent an email invitation to participate; the resulting 112 participants represented an 18% response rate. After data cleaning and error checking, 92 responses (56 female and 36 male) were used in the final analysis. The sample consisted of 64 (69.6 %) online instructors and 28 (30.4 %) face-to-face instructors. Age related data were not collected (see rationale below).

Materials and Procedure

After obtaining site authorization and Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, 606 faculty members received email invitations to participate. The emailed hyperlink allowed respondents to complete the two portions of the survey – demographics and passion items. In the first part of the survey, respondents answered questions on academic discipline, faculty rank, gender, instructional level (undergraduate, graduate, or doctoral), teaching modality, and years of college teaching experience. Age data were not analyzed as previous studies had shown no significant variance in passion across the lifespan (Philippe, Vallerand, & Lavigne, 2009; Vallerand, 2010).

In the second part of the survey, respondents answered the 16-item Passion Scale adapted for teachers (Carbonneau et al., 2008). This Passion Scale uses a 7-point Likert scale and has three subscales. Four of the 16 items assess the existence of passion (meeting the passion criteria), while 12 items (six each) assess the two passion types (harmonious and obsessive). Carbonneau et al. (2008) used confirmatory data analysis to validate goodness of fit to the data and Cronbach's alpha scores showed good reliability at .76 or above. In this study, the

Cronbach's alpha score for harmonious passion scale items was .87, and for obsessive passion scale items it was .84.

RESULTS

The frequencies and percentages of participants scoring a four or above on each of the passion criteria questions were generated. All previously reviewed studies on passion used the cut off of four on the 7-point Likert scale. The passion criteria were comprised of four items from the Passion Scale. The criteria included questions on (a) activity time investment, (b) liking the activity, (c) finding the activity important, and (d) identifying the activity as a passion. Of the 64 online instructors in the final sample, 61 (95 %) (39 female and 22 male) scored a four or above for each of the passion criteria, indicating self-perceived passion for online instruction. This finding is consistent with previous passion research (Vallerand, 2010). Of these online instructors, 58 (95%) were adjunct, 52 (86.6 %) taught in the social sciences (education and business) and the liberal arts, and 27 (45 %) taught undergraduates and 33 (55 %) graduates (with 1 missing). Lastly, passionate online instructors ($M = 5.92$, $SD = 4.379$) had on average slightly less college teaching experience than their face-to-face counterparts in the sample ($M = 7.52$, $SD = 8.016$).

For the face-to-face instructors, 27 (96.4 %) (15 female and 12 male) scored a four or above for each of the passion criteria, which was slightly higher than the online instructors. Of these face-to-face instructors, 17 (62.9 %) were adjunct, with 8 (29.6 %) holding a rank of assistant professor or higher. This was a much lower percentage than the online instructor subsample. Also, only 14 (51 %) of face-to-face instructors taught in the social sciences and the liberal arts, with 8 (25.9 %) teaching in natural sciences and mathematics. In addition, 25 (92.5 %) of the face-to-face instructors taught undergraduates. Since the remainder of the analysis

focused exclusively on only those measured as passionate for the activity of instruction, only 88 (61 online and 27 face-to-face) were included in the final between groups analysis.

The first inferential analysis involved passion orientation by teaching modality. In accord with the procedure recommended by Amiot et al. (2006), the raw scores for the passion items were transformed into z-scores based on the whole-sample mean and standard deviation for each of the two subscales. Passion orientation resulted from taking the higher of the two z-scores for each instructor. This resulted in coding each case as either oriented toward either harmonious or obsessively passionate for instruction by modality. Due to the dichotomous nature of the variables teaching modality (face-to-face or online) and passion orientation (harmonious or obsessive), a phi coefficient (instead of a chi-square) was used to assess the magnitude of association between the two categorical variables (Warner, 2008). Preliminary analysis confirmed that the data conformed to the minimum expected cell requirement for this type of analysis (Warner, 2008). As expected, no significant association between the two variables was found ($\phi = .074$, $p = .488$). As for the frequencies and percentages, there was nearly an even split of passion orientation by teaching modality, with one small exception. Although nearly 50 percent in both teaching modes measured as obsessively passionate, the online sample scored 7 % higher. As shown in Table 1, 32 (52.5 %) of online instructors for the sample scored as obsessively passionate for online instruction. It may be important to note that 30 of the 32 (93.8 %) obsessive online instructors were also adjunct instructors, which may be a contributing factor. Due to the array of potential negative outcomes of obsessive passion, this is a relevant finding to discuss in relation to distance education theory.

Table 1

Frequencies and Percentages of Passion Orientation by Teaching Modality

	FTF	%	Online	%
Harmonious	15	55.5%	29	47.5%
Obsessive	12	45.5%	32	52.5%

The second analysis involved harmonious passion by teaching modality. The harmonious passion variable resulted from a composite score created by adding the harmonious passion items for each participant and dividing by six. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) allowed for the comparison of means of the two groups on the dependent variable of harmonious passion. Preliminary analysis confirmed that the data conformed to the assumptions for this type of approach (Warner, 2008). As expected, there was no significant difference for harmonious passion by modality ($F(1, 86) = 2.086, p = .152$). As Table 2 shows, there was only a small variation in mean harmonious scores and standard deviations by modality.

Table 2

Mean Harmonious Passion Scores and Standard Deviations by Modality

	M	SD	N
Face-to-Face	5.90	.912	27
Online	6.17	.751	61

The third analysis involved obsessive passion by teaching modality. The obsessive passion variable resulted from a composite score created by adding the obsessive passion items for each participant and dividing by six. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) allowed for the comparison of means of the two groups on the dependent variable of obsessive passion. Preliminary analysis confirmed that the data conformed to the assumptions for this type of approach (Warner, 2008). As expected, there was no significant difference for obsessive passion

by modality ($F(1, 86) = 2.231$ $p = .139$). As Table 3 shows, there was only a small variation in mean obsessive scores and standard deviations by modality.

Table 3

Mean Obsessive Passion Scores and Standard Deviations by Modality

	M	SD	N
Face-to-Face	3.14	1.35	27
Online	3.61	1.40	61

DISCUSSION

As expected, there was no statistically significant difference in passion orientation, harmonious passion, or obsessive passion by modality. As such, this study provides evidence to support the relevance of using the passion construct to explore other aspects of motivation in online instructors. As for theory, there could be an exploration of the intra- and interpersonal outcomes of passion research in relationship with distance education theory. Good candidates for theoretical analysis include positive emotions indicative of harmonious passion and the constructs of teaching presence and social presences within the community of inquiry model that lead to immediate behaviors of instructors (Baker, 2010; Holmberg, 2003). Lastly, the conclusions of Philippe et al. (2010) on the correlation of harmonious passion, positive emotions, and positive interpersonal relationships provides a specific framework to understand optimal instructor behavior that may reduce student perceived psychological distance in online learning environments (Moore & Kearsley, 2012). There is a need for further research to explore if this holds for online instructors.

If teaching presence is the binding element within the community of inquiry model, then the dualistic model of passion, specifically harmonious passion, may be one optimal motivational

construct in online facilitation (Garrison et al., 2000, p. 96). Put another way, harmonious passion may be one important motivational factor that leads to consistent immediate behaviors (Baker, 2010; Holmberg, 2003; Thweatt & McCroskey, 1996). Future research could explore the role of harmonious passion in moderating perceived psychological distance. Theoretically, harmonious passionate online instructors would likely manifest enriched teacher facilitation and lead to more consistent student satisfaction and achievement. As Philippe et al. (2010) explained previous research showed that positive emotions are positively correlated with “increased closeness and relationship satisfaction” (p. 918; Algoe, Haidt, & Gable, 2008; Waugh & Fredrickson, 2006). Also, the teaching and social presences of the community of inquiry model intersect in the constructs of affect and emotions (Garrison, 2011). As a result of this study, a potentially fruitful direction for research is empirically applying the dualistic model of passion to both teaching and social presences using the community of inquiry model.

Next, the frequency of obsessive passion is important to discuss. For example, 32 (52.5 %) of the 61 passionate online instructors scored an obsessively passionate orientation toward their role as online instructors. While this was only 7 % greater than the face-to-face population, in either modality such a high percentage of obsessive passion should be cause for concern. Obsessive passion correlates with such traits as negative emotions, poor decision-making, and rumination (Vallerand, 2010). While obsessively passionate online instructors by definition like (or even love) their activity engagement (online instruction), which may produce in some a rigid persistence in meeting instructional goals, the intra- and interpersonal outcomes likely would not lead to optimal results for either the instructor or those with whom the instructor interacts. The contrast in negative outcomes correlated with obsessive passion and the positive outcomes in

harmonious passion call for a discussion of what influences development and sustaining a type of passion. One candidate is the construct of autonomy support.

As Mageau et al. (2009) showed, autonomy support is an important element of not only developing but also sustaining harmonious passion over time. “Autonomy-supportive adults place value on self-initiation and encourage choice and participation in decision making” (Mageau, et al., 2009, p. 611). As Philippe et al. (2010) stated, “the type of passion one holds for an activity predicts the quality of interpersonal relationships within the context of that activity” (p. 929). Without autonomy support, theoretically the onset or existence of obsessive passion is more likely. A first step toward this would be to assess instructor perceived autonomy support. Baard, Deci, and Ryan (2004) specifically developed a work climate questionnaire for this very purpose. Future research could explore the autonomy supportive nature of the working environment under which online instructors operate, so as to correlate this with passion orientation and teaching outcomes.

Lastly, there were some obvious limitations of the current study. These include the skew in demographic characteristics, including primarily adjunct instructors, who taught in the social sciences, and at the undergraduate level. Currently, there are studies planned that would address these deficiencies. Specifically, stratifying for these characteristics would result in a balanced cell count. As such, a factorial design would result in exploration of main and interaction effects (Warner, 2008). Interaction effects could prove especially useful in analyzing variance of online instructor passion by discipline and rank.

CONCLUSION

The results indicate that passion for teaching does not vary as a function of instructional mode (online or face-to-face); as such, it is relevant to further explore the relationship of face-to-

face teacher passion outcomes with those in an online context (Carbonneau et al., 2008; Philippe et al., 2010). Further research could examine unique aspects of passion in online instruction, specifically relating to the research of factors that initiate, mediate, and sustain such passion for the activity of online teaching. The current investigation provided a basis for continued research to identify how passion for online instruction could lead to improved instructional practices, more effective evaluation of online faculty, and enhanced protocols and training techniques for deans and faculty supervisors to create autonomy supportive learning environments for online instructors.

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